**MID-TERM EVALUATION**

**of the**

**ARAB KNOWLEDGE PROJECT (AKP)**

*For the period 2016-2019*

**commissioned by the**

**UNITED NATIONS DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME (UNDP)**

**REGIONAL BUREAU FOR THE ARAB STATES (RBAS)**

**Final report prepared and submitted by**

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**June 2020**

**Acknowledgement**

This mid-term Evaluation was commissioned by UNDP Regional Bureau for Arab States (RBAS) for the Arab Knowledge Project (AKP) launched in 2008 through a partnership with Mohammed Bin Rashid Al Maktoum Knowledge Foundation (MBRF), which was followed by phase II in (2016-2020). The primary audience and users of the report are UNDP RBAS, the AKP team and the MBRF, as well as their stakeholders and all interested in the project progress and lessons learned.

The Evaluation was carried out by Cosette Maiky, MA, MSc, PhD with active support from UNDP Regional Bureau in facilitating the Evaluation process.

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| --- |
| **Project Information** |
| **Project title** | Arab Knowledge Project  |
| **Atlas ID** | 00089271 |
| **Corporate outcome and output** | RPD (2018-2021) Outcome 1: Accelerate structural transformation of productive capacities in a sustainable and inclusive mannerRPD Output 1.5.1: Capacities and systems developed to promote knowledge-based economic transformations that foster collaboration between education and industry (Strategic Plan 1.1.2) |
| **Country** |  |
| **Region** | Arab States Region |
| **Date project document signed** | Substantive Revision January 1, 2016-December 31,2020 |
| **Project dates** | **Start** | **Planned end** |
| 2016 | 2020 |
| **Project budget** |  USD 8,602,275 |
| **Project expenditure at the time of Evaluation** | USD 7,821,974 |
| **Funding source** | MBRF |
| **Implementing party[[1]](#footnote-1)** | UNDP |

|  |
| --- |
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| **Evaluation type (project/ outcome/thematic/country programme, etc.)** | Project |
| **Final/midterm review/ other** | Midterm |
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# Table of Contents

[Table of Contents 4](#_Toc45121182)

[List of Tables 5](#_Toc45121183)

[List of Acronyms and Abbreviations 6](#_Toc45121184)

[Executive Summary 7](#_Toc45121185)

[Introduction 12](#_Toc45121186)

[Description of the Intervention 14](#_Toc45121187)

[Evaluation Scope and Objectives 20](#_Toc45121188)

[Specific Objectives of the Evaluation 20](#_Toc45121189)

[Evaluation Criteria and Evaluation Questions 21](#_Toc45121190)

[Evaluation Approach and Methods 23](#_Toc45121191)

[Cross-Cutting Issues 28](#_Toc45121192)

[Data Analysis 28](#_Toc45121193)

[Findings 30](#_Toc45121194)

[Conclusions 50](#_Toc45121195)

[Lessons Learnt 52](#_Toc45121196)

[Annexes 53](#_Toc45121197)

[ANNEX I Terms of Reference of the Evaluation 53](#_Toc45121198)

[ANNEX II Evaluation Matrix 53](#_Toc45121199)

[ANNEX III List of individuals or groups interviewed 53](#_Toc45121200)

[ANNEX IV List of Supporting Documents Reviewed 53](#_Toc45121201)

[ANNEX V Project Results Framework 53](#_Toc45121202)

[ANNEX VI Summary Tables of Progress towards Outputs, Targets and Goals 53](#_Toc45121203)

[ANNEX VII Code of Conduct Signed by Evaluator 53](#_Toc45121204)

# List of Tables

**Table 1: Project rating per Evaluation criteria and overall rating**

**Table 2: Lessons learnt and recommendations in line with main findings per Evaluation criteria**

**Table 3: Evaluation criteria and Evaluation questions**

**Table 4: Project rating scale**

**Table 5: Planned vs. actual expenditure between 2016 and 2019**

**Table 6: Suggested recommendations in line with main findings per Evaluation criteria**

**Table 7: Lessons learnt in line with main findings per Evaluation criteria**

# List of Acronyms and Abbreviations

**AHDR** Arab Human Development Report

**AKI** Arab Knowledge Index

**AKP** Arab Knowledge Project

**COVID-19** Corona Virus Disease 2019

**CSOs** Civil Society Organizations

**EQ** Evaluation Question

**FGD** Focus Group Discussion

**GKI** Global Knowledge Index

**KIIs** Key Informant Interviews

**MBRF** Mohammed Bin Rashid Al Maktoum Knowledge Foundation

**M&E** Monitoring and Evaluation

**NHDR** National Human Development Report

**OECD-DAC** Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development - Development Assistance Committee

**RBAS** Regional Bureau for Arab States

**ROAR** Results-Oriented Annual Report

**SDGs** Sustainable Development Goals

**TOC** Theory of Change

**TOR** Terms of Reference

**UNDP** United Nations Development Programme

**UNEG** UnitedNations Evaluation Group

**UNESCO** United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

# Executive Summary

This document presents the report for the mid-term Evaluation of the Arab Knowledge Project (AKP) with the implementation period of January 2016 - August 2019. The project fully funded by the Mohammed Bin Rashid Al Maktoum Foundation (MBRF), was launched in 2008 through a partnership between the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and MBRF, which was followed by a new phase covering the period 2016-2020, then a 10-year extension (2020-2030). The project aims to promote knowledge societies and policies as transformational means to achieve sustainable development. The AKP contributes to driving active conversation and raise awareness on the importance of knowledge and knowledge-based policies for sustainable development. Hence, it encourages using knowledge generation as advocacy tools, aiming to widely disseminate and embed in policy debates. More specifically, AKP strives to achieve two key outputs: (a) Arab Knowledge Index (AKI) and Knowledge4all digital portal to provide easily accessible data on knowledge accumulation, generation and consumption within a development framework; and (b) Participatory platforms to maximize outreach and dissemination of knowledge products developed, and building educational capacities (ministries, universities, regional research institutions, etc.) to improve the state of knowledge in Arab countries.

The Evaluation was commissioned by UNDP RBAS and conducted by an independent Evaluation expert. The primary audience and users of the report are UNDP RBAS management, the AKP team and the MBRF, as well as their stakeholders and all interested in the project progress and lessons learned. The purpose of this exercise was to generate knowledge from the project implementation for the organizational accountability and learning, as well as future planning and implementation. The specific objectives included: (a) Analyze the relevance of the project strategy and approaches; (b) Validate the project results in terms of achievements and/or weaknesses toward the targeted results; (c) Assess the potential for sustainability of the results and the feasibility of ongoing, regionally nationally-led efforts and commitment to help promote knowledge societies and policies as transformational means to achieve sustainable development; (d) Document key lessons learned, good practices, success stories and challenges to inform future work of various stakeholders in addressing the area of fostering knowledge; and (e) Document and analyze possible weaknesses in order to improve next steps of project interventions in the mentioned area.

The Evaluator utilized a diverse range of data collection methods that included systematic review of existing documentation, mapping of available contextual analyses, data analysis, including national statistical data and UNDP Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) data, technical analysis and testing of theories of change/strategies, and semi-structured interviews. For this latter, the Evaluator used Consensual Qualitative Research (CQR) methods. The Evaluation’s strategy adopted a purposive sampling approach[[2]](#footnote-2) to conduct interviews according to the OECD-DAC criteria of relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact and sustainability. For each criterion, an Evaluation rating was applied as follows: 1 for highly unsatisfactory (The project had negative factors with severe defaults or weaknesses), 2 for *unsatisfactory (The project had negative factors with major defaults or weaknesses),* 3 for *partially satisfactory (The project had moderate to notable defaults or weaknesses), 4 for satisfactory (The project had positive factors with minor defaults or weaknesses) , and 5 for highly satisfactory (The project had several significant positive factors with no defaults or weaknesses).*

Due to COVID-19 and travel restrictions, 17 Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) and 1 Focus Group Discussion were held virtually with stakeholders within the original timeframe. Interviews were based on an Evaluation Matrix specifically designed during the inception phase.

The Evaluation upheld ethical standards in conducting interviews, collecting, managing, analyzing, and disseminating data which draw on the UN Ethical Guidelines (UNEG) for Evaluation[[3]](#footnote-3) (2008), the UNEG Norms and Standards[[4]](#footnote-4) (2017) and the UNDP Evaluation Guidelines[[5]](#footnote-5) (2019). All the necessary measures were undertaken to ensure objectivity and independence of Evaluation.

The overall rating of the project is *Satisfactory*. The AKP has, in general, been marked by noticeable achievements, given its particular context conditions and timing of implementation. Most of the answers to the Evaluation questions with which the Evaluation was carried out were positive. In addition, the project’s achievements included the timely, adequate, equitable and continuous delivery of services, improving the existing ones, and creating new ones in response to the needs that emerged and the prevailing situation.

Table 1 provides an overview of the project rating per Evaluation category. Additionally, the project highlights several lessons learned about do’s and don’ts to be taken into consideration in future planning and progress reporting.

**Table 1: Project rating per Evaluation criteria and overall rating**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Rating of Performance**  | **Characteristics**  |
| **Relevance**  | Highly Satisfactory  |
| **Effectiveness**  | Highly Satisfactory  |
| **Efficiency**  | Satisfactory  |
| **Impact**  | Satisfactory  |
| **Sustainability**  | Satisfactory  |
| **OVERAL RATING**  | **SATISFACTORY**  |

**Relevance**

***The relevance of the project is rated as ‘ Highly Satisfactory’.***

Problem analysis has been performed through a regular and consistent consultation process before and during the interventions, that involved the donor, the organization, the service providers, policy makers, youth groups as well as Civil Society Organizations (CSOs). With a strong participatory design, the implemented interventions were aligned to the mandate, strategy, function, roles and responsibilities of key actors, and relevant to the identified technical priorities and needs of partners and stakeholders, and well-aligned with national (in the selected contexts), regional and global priorities. In addition, it was found that the implementation strategy was coherent and consistent with the Regional Programme Document (RPD) during the two cycles 2014 - 2017 and 2018 - 2021. The progress achieved against output indicators during the evaluation period, which covers the two cycles, is presented in Annex VI.

**Effectiveness**

***The effectiveness of the project is rated as ‘Highly Satisfactory’.***

With an extremely marked flexibility and ability to adapt to unexpected threats or risks, the team succeeded in achieving the desired results during the Evaluation period. Many elements of the project interventions were verifiably effective in terms of the achievement of most planned outputs, and their plausible contribution to the expected outcome. The adopted actions and strategies were strongly relevant to achieving the expected results in the concerned areas in the period 2016-2019.

**Efficiency**

***The efficiency of the project is rated as ‘Satisfactory’.***

There was near consensus amongst partners from government and donors that the AKP results had been timely achieved with little waste and duplication, given its “very innovative and creative” aspects. The Evaluator was impressed that the AKP team (supported by RBAS) managed to implement a highly effective resource mobilization strategy and ensure a 10-year extension of the project. As the bulk of funding goes to support activities, long term prospects for financial and programming stability (beyond planned activities) does not fall within the scope of the present Evaluation.

**Impact**

***The impact of the project is rated as ‘Satisfactory’.***

Various stakeholders from government, civil society, youth groups and donor organisation confirmed that the AKP project has contributed positively to some changes in institutional performance and actions prompted by Governments. However, although UNDP’s role was highly valued and acknowledged by government and non-government partners, it is still early to comment on the extent to which achieved interventions have systematically contributed to a change in government practices.

**Sustainability**

***The sustainability of the project is rated as ‘Satisfactory’.***

The project has noticeably contributed to improving local actors’ ownership. The AKP team utilized a proper mix of relevant strategies in pursuing UNDP’s RBAS catalytic role with measurable success achieved in policy dialogue and advice, knowledge generation and capacity development of government and civil society. The project was a demonstrated model of collaborative/participatory work among stakeholders and a good initiative towards ‘institutional ownership’.

The Evaluation conclusion is the following: the AKP is a ***satisfactory*** project that has created outputs and results with strong impact potential both at the Regional and Country levels. The project has demonstrated the power of joint efforts across government, UNDP, and various engaged stakeholders. With an extremely tailored and targeted approach, the project has set a solid foundation of expertise for the implementation of the AKP for the years to come. Moreover, the project triggered further efforts towards institutionalizing of knowledge in the selected implementation environments, opening up the room for more opportunities of consistent factoring of knowledge products into policy making and planning.

The lessons learned and the recommendations are detailed in line with main findings per evaluation criteria.

**Table 2: lessons learnt and recommendations in line with main findings per evaluation criteria**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Main rating per criterion** | **Lessons Learnt** | **Recommendation** |
| **Relevance***Highly Satisfactory* | In the extremely complex realities of the Arab Region, the results-oriented approach and continuously monitor internal and external supporting and constraining factors affecting operations are key factors to ensure the relevance of interventions. | Maintain and further develop standards and procedures (meetings, assessments/situational analysis/contingency plans, etc.) to ensure readiness to quickly identify and address unexpected/emerging issues and extend support to UNDP Country Offices in new areas of catchment  |
| **Effectiveness***Highly Satisfactory* | The importance of strategic partnerships with UN sister agencies and international financial institutions on advancing knowledge is critical and essential | Keep on exploring possibilities of joint initiatives with agencies such as UNESCO for education verticals, which would eventually foster complementarities and synergy among UN agencies to collectively work together on common national/regional development priorities.  |
| **Efficiency***Satisfactory* | The diversification of means of verification (quantitative and qualitative) is essential to capture the quality of interventions that are usually reported numerically. | Further develop the Results Framework and M&E architecture of the project and corresponding quantitative and qualitative reporting tools, so that monitoring and measuring achievements and progress of the project.  |
| **Impact***Satisfactory* | Quality and reliable data are critically important to identify vulnerable groups (**especially when it comes to gender, disability and vulnerable/marginalized groups**), assess equity aspects and monitor whether the mainstreaming actions implemented advance their rights. | Plan and support the systematic incorporation of cross-cutting issues, namely gender in the project documentation along any project cycle. |
| **Sustainability***Satisfactory* | Strategic positioning can be considered as a cornerstone for national, regional or international scale-up, especially in the context of South-South and Triangular Cooperation between and among developing countries. | Initiate awareness raising efforts to sensitize Government institutions in new Arab settings on the importance of backing decision-making and policy-making with knowledge, and consequently, encourage them to mobilize required funds in their national budgets, which will enhance “institutional ownership” of initiatives at country level.  |

# Introduction

This document presents the report for the mid-term Evaluation of the Arab Knowledge Project (AKP) with the implementation period of January 2016 - August 2019. Fully funded by Mohammed Bin Rashid Al Maktoum Foundation (MBRF), the project was launched in 2008 through a partnership between the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and MBRF. The project was followed by phase II in (2016-2020). It sought to promote knowledge generation and dissemination, to foster policy dialogue through examination of key regional development issues, and to develop capacities for the identification and application of development solutions that are human-centred, inclusive and sustainable. As the project has been further extended to 2030, the mid-term Evaluation was commissioned by UNDP RBAS and conducted by an independent Evaluation expert during May - June 2020 period. the exercise had a dual perspective, to address the project’s progress (and challenges) taking into consideration linkages to the broader initiative (at the Regional Programme outcome level), and to address the capacities developed through the project through the prism of OECD-DAC Evaluation criteria: relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, sustainability, and impact. The Evaluator took into consideration the evolving context of the interventions and its influence on decisions made during each phase of implementation.

With both ***formative*** and ***summative*** focuses, the exercise was premised on the fact that to be useful in future planning, it should focus on validated lessons that can make a difference in successor similar interventions. For this, a balance was struck between independent scrutiny and participatory approaches. With respect to the latter, a high level of participation was ensured in terms of feedback and discussion of Evaluation questions. That said, the intention was not to produce a consensus report, but rather one that reflects the judgement of the Evaluator fully informed by evidence and feedback.

The primary audience and users of the report are UNDP RBAS, the AKP team and the MBRF through the recommendations on substantive and process issues that shall inform the future direction, implementation, and the next steps of the project for the upcoming phase 2020-2030; as well as their stakeholders and all interested in the project progress and lessons learned.

This final report includes the Executive Summary and the main body of the report with the following sections:

1. The *Introduction and Overview* provides the background and explains the main purpose of the final Evaluation;
2. The *Description of the Intervention Being Evaluated* explains the project in brief;
3. The *Evaluation Scope and Objective* provides a description of the segments of the target population included, the geographic area included, and which components, outputs or outcomes were and were not assessed.
4. The *Evaluation Approach and Methods* comprises the rational for the approach and methodology of the Evaluation as well as the limitations of the chosen methods and cross-cutting issues;
5. The *Data Analysis* includes a description of data analysis methods;
6. The *Findings* details the findings from (a) change analysis over actual progress to complete each activity, and (b) contribution analysis across the Evaluation criteria of (a) relevance, (b) effectiveness, (c) efficiency, (d) impact and (e) sustainability;
7. The *Conclusion* section concludes to strategic remarks on the findings;
8. The *Recommendations* lists the recommendations crystalized throughout the mid-term Evaluation;
9. The last section, *Lessons Learned* reflects on the major lessons learned from the project during the evaluated implementation period.

At the end of the document, the *Annexes* section provides a list of documents annexed to this report.

# Description of the Intervention

This section provides an overview of the evaluated project reflecting on its context, theory of change, target groups, implementation arrangements, financing, reporting and Monitoring & Evaluation, partners, and progress during the implementation phase.

UNDP’s regional project on Knowledge is part of the UNDP Regional Programme for the Arab States.[[6]](#footnote-6) The project was launched in 2008 through a partnership with Mohammed Bin Rashid Al Maktoum Knowledge Foundation (MBRF), which was followed by phase II in (2016-2020), and a 10-year extension for 2020-2030. The project sought to promote knowledge generation and dissemination, to foster policy dialogue through examination of key regional development issues, and to develop capacities for the identification and application of development solutions that are human-centred, inclusive and sustainable.

Over the past decade, the Arab region has experienced defining moments in its modern history. Millions of women and men across the region have issued a resounding call for change. Youth have voiced in new ways their aspirations for a say in the decisions that affect their lives, and for transparent and accountable governance. People of all walks of life in several countries have united to demand that governments honor the dignity that they carry inside and recognize in one another. For the first time in the region, by late 2011 several countries have taken bold steps towards new patterns of governance—but all are still undergoing intense renegotiations of their future trajectories. While the outcomes of these waves of change cannot be known at present, what is certain is that the Arab countries have embarked upon a period of profound and active reconsideration of the way forward. The coming years are likely to see Arab societies engaged in ongoing debate and experimentation as increasingly empowered citizens and public officials both new and long-standing contend with evolving realities and seek to articulate new visions for the relationship between state and society. In doing so Arab countries will be grappling not only with general governance and development challenges but also with a relative lack of high-quality data and evidence-based analysis on which to base dialogue and policy-making processes. Decades of political challenges and underinvestment in knowledge sectors have left the Arab region (as compared to other parts of the world), with a relative lack of open spaces for dialogue and debate, and with relatively few opportunities for nationally and regionally-owned rigorous analysis of sensitive political and development dynamics[[7]](#footnote-7). That said, despite the need to foster knowledge was identified by the project before the 2011 uprisings, the transformation triggered in several countries by those uprisings made the scope of the project even more relevant. On the basis thereof, the UNDP RBAS has established a strong track record not only of highlighting these challenges but also seeking to address them directly. Since 2002, the flagship of this overall process has been the *Arab Human Development Report* (AHDR)[[8]](#footnote-8),which in five editions has achieved significant advances in generating and disseminating knowledge while also fostering debate and dialogue within a framework of evidence and a basis in both regional realities and international principles. These reports have made significant contributions to the knowledge and policy agenda in the region. A concrete outcome emanating from the second Arab Human Development Report launched in 2003 is the Arab Knowledge Report, which has led to the current partnership with the MBRF. This partnership has institutionalized work around one of the key pillars identified in the 2003 Arab Human Development Report: “Embedding science in Arab society, broadening the capacity for research and development and joining the information revolution decisively”. The Arab Knowledge Report series sought to sharpen the analytical focus on the knowledge challenge in the Arab countries while fostering additional dialogue on options for transitioning towards knowledge-based societies across the region. The first Arab Knowledge Report “Towards productive intercommunication for knowledge” was launched in 2009 and emphasized two central and mutually dependent premises. The first is the connection between knowledge, development and freedom. The second is the close relationship between the demands of development and the building of the knowledge society. The second Arab Knowledge Report “Preparing future generations for the knowledge society” was launched on 14 March 2012 and built on the main findings of the Arab Knowledge Report 2009, which highlighted the knowledge gap and the low levels of cognitive performance among Arabs in knowledge related arenas. The report emphasized that it is possible to deal with and bridge this gap in the Arab region, provided the existence of political will and the mobilization of resources and capabilities, specifically preparing future generations of children and young people and the formation of critical mass of qualified human capital who is cognitively qualified to lead the processes of building a knowledge-based society and economy. The third Arab Knowledge Report launched in 2014 was an opportunity to showcase the integration of youth and localization of knowledge in the Arab World as a vital issue for the present and the future. In addressing this issue, the 2014 Arab Knowledge Report offered a pivotal step in the journey towards establishing the knowledge society, in which the youth are the main pillar. It was a quest to enable the youth in the Arab Region to actively participate in achieving sustainable development in their countries through the wide horizons of the knowledge society.

Aiming to widen the partnership’s scope of impact and reach, UNDP RBAS and MBRF reinforced their strategic partnership by extending the Arab Knowledge Project for five years (2016 - 2020), which was aimed at emphasizing youth empowerment through knowledge given the sociodemographic structure of the Arab Region. The AKP aimed at promoting knowledge societies and policies as transformational means to achieve sustainable development. The project also contributed to driving active conversation and raise awareness on the importance of knowledge and knowledge-based policies for sustainable development. Hence, it encouraged using knowledge generation as advocacy tools, aiming to widely disseminate and embed in policy debates. More specifically, AKP has strived to achieve two key outputs:

1. The Arab Knowledge Index (AKI) and the Knowledge4all digital portal to provide easily accessible data on knowledge accumulation, generation and consumption within a development framework;
2. Participatory platforms to maximize outreach and dissemination of knowledge products developed, and building educational capacities (ministries, universities, regional research institutions, etc.) to improve the state of knowledge in Arab countries.

Over the course of phase II, while enhancing existing knowledge products (Arab Knowledge Index (AKI) and digital portal [Knowledge4all]), the AKP focused on designing and launching new knowledge products, namely the Global Knowledge Index (GKI)[[9]](#footnote-9) and the Future of Knowledge Foresight Report[[10]](#footnote-10), to provide easily accessible data on knowledge within a development framework. This includes measuring performance of countries in the Arab region (and beyond, with the GKI), on knowledge acquisition, generation and dissemination.

The ultimate target groups have been the people both at the global and regional levels, particularly the poor and disadvantaged populations, who are expected to benefit from enhanced access to knowledge and information, as well as improved evidence-based and people-centred policies. At the Arab region level, the recipients of the services and tools provided by the project have been planners and policy makers who can use the findings of the Reports and other knowledge products – as well as the consensus engendered – in developing policies, strategies, plans, programs and budgets. Additional recipients have included civil society organizations that can use the findings to advocate for human development – related changes in the region.

While the initial logframe of the AKP figuring in Annex V contained two outputs[[11]](#footnote-11), summary tables of progress towards outputs, targets and goals (listed in Annex VI) show that in 2016, the AKP had three main outputs (with a budget of USD 1,947,524):

1. Arab Knowledge Index (AKI) 2015 and Arab Knowledge Portal outreach strategy implemented;
2. AKI 2016 developed, updated and launched; and
3. Arab Knowledge Portal enhanced and updated.

In 2017, the project had two main outputs (with a budget of USD 2,495,141):

1. Arab Knowledge Index 2016 and Knowledge4All portal and mobile application outreach strategy implemented; and
2. Global Knowledge Index produced and launched, and Arab Knowledge Index 2017 and Knowledge4all portal and mobile application developed, launched and enhanced to provide easily accessible data on knowledge accumulation, production and transfer within a developmental framework.

As for 2018, the project had two main outputs (with a budget of USD 1,744,280):

1. Global Knowledge Index 2017 and Knowledge4All portal and mobile application outreach strategy implemented;
2. Global Knowledge Index 2018 produced and launched, and Knowledge4all portal and mobile application updated and enhanced to provide easily accessible data on knowledge accumulation, production and transfer within a developmental framework.

Over the course of 2019, the project maintained two outputs (with a budget of USD 2,114,238):

1. Global Knowledge Index 2018, Knowledge and the Fourth Industrial Revolution Report, Future of Knowledge Report, and Knowledge4All portal and mobile application outreach strategy implemented;
2. Global Knowledge Index 2019 and Future of Knowledge Foresight Report 2019 produced and launched, and Knowledge4all portal and mobile application updated and enhanced to provide easily accessible data on knowledge accumulation, production, and transfer within a developmental framework

Within the scope of the present exercise, it was useful to distinguish between the logical framework – the matrix which summarises the main elements of the programme of work and connects them to each other – and the logical framework approach – the overall process by which the elements which go into the matrix are formulated. While the yearly logical framework of the project witnessed some variations in terminology, a reasonable consistency was maintained in the implementation approach during the evaluated period: first, because of: the reliable/predictable structure, and second because of the demonstrated ability to constantly re-observe horizontal and vertical logics to showcase how progress against each objective is being attained (i.e. in annual progress reports) using an appropriate set of means of verification (i.e. outreach capacity through social media statistics), while systematically accounting for the external factors (assumptions and risks) which might affect whether the reaching of the objectives will contribute to the next level. In this respect, it is important to note that most of the means of verification were quantitative measures that were used to state achievement of results where targets are met or exceeded, or even not met. However, it is only through the additional information collected from interviews that the Evaluator structured the data to further expose the hidden quality of some actions that only showed in the qualitative investigation.

On the systematic inclusion of cross-cutting issues in the project documentation, while capacity building/development can be considered as a “key” term across the project documentation, there was no evidence of systematic incorporation of other thematic issues such as right-based approach, gender equality, women’s empowerment or people with disabilities in the documentation, except in the ROAR documents: In 2019, the document described the GEN2 labelled GKI as “GKI addresses issues related to gender equality and women’s rights as main drivers for establishing the aspired knowledge society and knowledge economy. As such, the 2019 edition of the GKI continues to include a whole sub-pillar focusing on gender parity and female inclusion as part of the socio-economic pillar under the general enabling environment sub-index. This sub-pillar measures women’s status in educational attainment, the percentage of women in parliaments, and labor force participation rate of female”).

# Evaluation Scope and Objectives

This mid-term Evaluation covers the implementation period from January 2016 till August 2019.

In assessing the AKP ‘s Outputs over the Evaluation period (see Annex V, Project Results Framework), the Evaluation took into consideration the criteria described in the *Evaluation Criteria and Evaluation Questions* section below. No outputs were excluded in the Evaluation period. Due to COVID-19 and travel restrictions, the field work that was initially scheduled to cover Dubai and Amman, was scheduled and virtually held. In addition to UNDP team (interviewed in a Focus Group Discussion), the pool included 17 respondents from Dubai, Amman, Cairo and Beirut. They fell under the respective categories: donor, policy maker/representative of public institutions, contracted experts/academics, youth and staff in UN sister agencies.

## Specific Objectives of the Evaluation

1. Analyze the relevance of the project strategy and approaches;
2. Validate the project results in terms of achievements and/or weaknesses toward the targeted results;
3. Assess the potential for sustainability of the results and the feasibility of ongoing, nationally-led efforts and commitment to help promote knowledge societies and policies as transformational means to achieve sustainable development;
4. Document key lessons learned, good practices, success stories and challenges to inform future work of various stakeholders in addressing the area of fostering knowledge; and
5. Document and analyze possible weaknesses in order to improve next steps of project interventions in the mentioned area.

The deliverables comprise the following: the inception report, the draft final report, and the final report, including all recommendations and lessons learned.

## Evaluation Criteria and Evaluation Questions

As per UNDP Evaluation Guidelines (2019), and the set ToR, the Evaluation was based on a number of Evaluation questions (EQs) covering five Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development - Development Assistance Committee (OECD-DAC) Evaluation criteria: relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact and sustainability. Their relative meaningfulness was assessed and trade-offs discussed in each case to ensure that key questions were addressed and to avoid unnecessary effort.

The following table demonstrates the link between the key tasks and the proposed Evaluation Questions (EQs) that were answered/tested by key stakeholders during the work that took place during the second half of May 2020.

**Table 3: Evaluation Criteria and Evaluation Questions**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Criterion** | **Tasks**  | **Proposed related EQ** |
| **Relevance** | * Analyze the relevance and alignment of the project strategy and approaches
* Analyze the relevance of the project’s design
 | 1. Was the project relevant, appropriate and strategic to *fostering knowledge for sustainable development* goals and challenges?
2. Was the project relevant, appropriate and strategic to the mandate, strategy, functions, roles, and responsibility of the key actors?
3. Was the project relevant, appropriate and strategic to the *UNDP development goals*?
4. To what extent did the design of the project help in achieving its own goals?
5. Was the context, problem, needs and priorities well analyzed while designing the project?
6. Were there clear objectives and strategy?
7. Were there clear baseline indicators and/or benchmark for performance?
8. Was the process of project design sufficiently participatory? Was there any impact of the process?
9. Was there coherence and complementarity by the project to other entities in the field of fostering knowledge?
10. Was there coherence, coordination and complementarity by the project with other donor funded activities in the field of fostering knowledge?
 |
| **Effectiveness** | * Assess progress towards attaining the project’s objectives
* Assess progress towards the achievement of the project’s outcome
* Review the clarity of roles and responsibilities of the various agencies and stakeholders and the level of coordination between relevant actors in the project implementation
* Document and analyze possible weaknesses in order to improve next steps of project interventions in the focus areas
* Document key lessons learned, good practices, success stories and challenges to inform future work of various stakeholders in addressing the focus area of the project
 | 1. Were the actions to achieve the outputs and outcomes effective and efficient?
2. Were there any lessons learned, failures/lost opportunities? What might have been done better or differently?
3. How did the project deal with issues and risks?
 |
| **Efficiency** | Assess the use of resources in the planning and execution of intended outputs (management arrangements, work planning, finance, value for money, timing and delays, project-level monitoring and Evaluation systems, coordination, stakeholder engagement, reporting, communications…) | 1. Were the outputs achieved in a timely manner?
2. Were the resources utilized in the best way possible?
3. Were the resources (time, funding, human resources) sufficient?
4. Are the project management arrangements appropriate at the team level and project board level?
5. Was there appropriate visibility and acknowledgement of the project and donor?
 |
| **Impact** | Assess project-induced changes (direct and/or indirect) from the perspective of available structures | 1. Will the outputs/outcomes lead to benefits beyond the life of the existing project?
2. Did the project address cross-cutting issues including gender?
 |
| **Sustainability** | * Assess the likelihood of continuation of the project outcome and benefits
* Describe key factors that will require attention in order to improve prospects for sustainability of the project results
* Assess the potential for sustainability of the results and the feasibility of ongoing efforts and commitment to help advance the focus areas of the project
 | 1. Were the actions and result owned by the partners and stakeholders?
2. Was the capacity (individuals, institution, and system) built through the actions of the project?
3. What is the level of contribution of the project management arrangements to national ownership of the set objectives, result and outputs?
4. Were the modes of deliveries of the outputs appropriate to promote regional / national ownership and sustainability of the result achieved?
 |

# Evaluation Approach and Methods

In accordance with the Terms of Reference (ToR), the below methodology notes for the Evaluation define further the main parameters of the exercise such as the conceptual models adopted with a description of data-collection methods, sources and analytical approaches to be employed, including the rationale for their selection (how they will inform the Evaluation) and their limitations; data-collection tools, instruments and protocols; and discussion of reliability and validity for the Evaluation and the sampling plan, including the rationale and limitations.

1. The Evaluation of the AKP served both a learning function (forward-looking/formative) and accountability function (historical/summative). The Evaluation took into consideration the evolving context of the interventions and its influence on decisions made during each phase of implementation.
2. The Evaluator recruited for this mid-term Evaluation exercise holds a PhD in Political Sociology, a Master of Research in Clinical Psychology, and a Master of Advanced Studies in Psychosocial Intervention in War-torn Societies (Lebanese University). She has 14 years of hands-on experience on conflict and post-conflict governance (with emphasis on Monitoring and Evaluation), with international organizations and intergovernmental bodies in more than 20 conflict settings in the Middle East and North Africa, Central, East and Southeast Asia.
3. The Evaluation model blended confirmatory research (determining the extent to which specific, expected results outlined in the logframe were achieved), exploratory research (examining what happened and what is currently happening without preconceived notions), and forward-looking analysis.
4. Rather than focusing on over-emphasizing the measurement of discrete outputs and indicators, the Evaluation was premised on the fact that to be useful in future planning, it should focus on validated lessons that can make a difference and bring later on sustainable improvement in similar successor projects. A balance was struck between independent scrutiny of the evaluator and triangulation and participatory approaches of the staff and stakeholders.
5. In order to provide an objective, evidence-based assessment as well as actionable recommendations, the evaluator adopted an action-oriented participatory Evaluation approach to evaluate selected interventions (depending on the scope and nature of various stakeholders that shall be sufficiently defined in the Evaluation report).
6. The adoption of indicators to assess the achievements of the project was informed by existing sources of information duly provided by UNDP.
7. In order to adequately respond to the Evaluation criteria laid out in the ToR, the evaluator developed an Evaluation matrix to fit her understanding of the assignment and developed a (non-exhaustive) list of questions and means for data collection and data analysis, with a view to identify lessons, examples of good practice and recommendations (see Annex II). As such, the questions were aligned with the (OECD-DAC) criteria for use in appraisals of development interventions.
8. The main sources for the information were:
	1. *Documents and literature* with a direct bearing on the issues of relevance collected in all available formats. Possible gaps in documentation were identified and duly filled in cooperation with UNDP’s staff. Data acquired during the desk review[[12]](#footnote-12) made accessible by UNDP via Dropbox were incorporated at the various levels of the research in order to inform the findings of the final report. Information provided by the desk review was incorporated in the compilation and content of the research tools that shall be employed during the Evaluation. The exhaustive documentation has provided the necessary evidence and information to answer questions of the ToR and to identify information and data gaps as well potential methodological difficulties that could be encountered through the Evaluation process. The desk review uncovered sources of usable secondary data, thus lessening redundancy during the collection of primary data.
	2. *Qualitative Information collected through 17 Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) and 1 Focus Group Discussion (FGD).* This approach was applied based on the developed matrix, and was particularly helpful to understand what some of the capacity constraints are, as well as the gaps, enablers and barriers[[13]](#footnote-13). All of the informants were approached by email to get their approval for the interview.

With support from the UNDP management and AKP’s team, the selection of 19 external respondents was purposive, and done by UNDP staff taking into consideration the criteria set in the framework for the Evaluation, such as: type of stakeholders and nature of engagement in the AKP (Experts as contributing authors, donor representative, public institutions/ministries representatives, youth participants in knowledge events), cross-cutting issues (gender, human rights, disability) and geographic scope.

Due to COVID-19 and travel restrictions, 17 Key Informant Interviews (KIIs), as well as one FGD, were scheduled and virtually held with stakeholders within the original timeframe (17 KIIs achieved out of 19 planned, response rate 89.4%). Interviews were based on the Evaluation Matrix specifically designed during the inception phase.

Each interview lasted anywhere from 14 and 45 minutes depending on the depth and significance of the interview to the Evaluation and the responses of the interviewee. The output of interviews was in the form of a near-verbatim write up.

All of the respondents welcomed the participation in the evaluation, and specific sets of questions, particularly those related to the impact level.

Despite the expected complexities in collecting consistent data on cross-cutting issues, the evaluator has particularly used probing in interviews, to ensure as much as possible inclusive participation and gathering feedback from both men and women to present a holistic picture of how the project was perceived amongst key demographics.

No significant outliers or unsuitable data were found in the collected data, after it was cleaned and coded.

* 1. *Quantitative information were* collected through secondary sources of information and used as deemed significant and indicative.
1. UNDP RBAS Reporting and knowledge management specialist ensured quality control along the process. She proactively engaged in: (a) providing background documentation at the inception stage in view of aligning the exercise with internal institutional requirements, (b) reviewing, commenting and endorsing the Inception Report, (c) coordinating communication with the AKP and RBAS teams, and (d) reviewing and commenting on the draft Evaluation Report.
2. The Ethical Protocol and Procedures drew on the UN Ethical Guidelines for Evaluation (2008) on the UNEG Norms and Standards (2016), and UNDP Evaluation Guidelines (2019).
3. The major limitation of the present Evaluation was the discrepancy between the design of the exercise and its implementation: The ToR designed before the COVID-19 epoch, envisaged a field visit to Amman and/or Dubai to meet with the project team and stakeholders in the field. However, due to regional and global constraints and movement restrictions posed by the pandemic, it was agreed upon carrying out the data collection within the original timeframe through virtual means (i.e. Zoom, Skype, etc…). It is noteworthy to mention that field visits could have offered better/stronger ability to grasp the dynamics and nuances required as part of the evaluation/assessment framework and methodology in each location.

## Cross-Cutting Issues

Along with all Evaluation verticals, gender equality, human rights, disabilities, minorities and vulnerable group issues were mainstreamed where relevant and feasible. Although collecting disaggregated data can be challenging and impacted by cultural norms and security concerns sometimes, the evaluator used diverse range of data sources (with particular emphasis on *probing* in interviews), to ensure as much as possible inclusive participation and gathering feedback from both men and women to present a holistic picture of how AKP’s interventions were perceived amongst key demographics.

# Data Analysis

For data analysis, the Evaluator used:

* consensual qualitative research (CQR) which is an inductive method that is characterized by open-ended interview questions, small samples, a reliance on words over numbers, the importance of context, an integration of multiple viewpoints, and consensus of the research team. It is especially well-suited to research that requires rich descriptions of inner experiences, attitudes, and convictions[[14]](#footnote-14). The main limitation of this kind of design or methodology is the generalizability (difficulty of measuring effects whether causality or correlation, qualitative research is not statistically representative, in this kind of methods, risks that results are influenced by the researcher's personal biases are greater, etc…)
* context-sensitive ***contribution analysis*** to explore and validate cause-effect assumptions and conclude about the contribution the project has made or not to both intended and unintended outcomes. Rather than focusing the contribution analysis will on quantification of contribution -which is limited by the nature of Evaluation methods-, the Evaluation was inclined to provide evidence to support ***reasonable conclusions about the contribution*** made by the project to the desired outcomes. A 5-point Likert rating scale was used to rate the project against each of the selected Evaluation criteria (5 for *highly satisfactory,* 4 for *satisfactory,* 3 for *partially satisfactory,* 2 for *unsatisfactory* and 1 for *highly unsatisfactory).*

**Table 4: Project rating scale**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Label (point)**  | **Characteristics**  |
| Highly Satisfactory (5)  | The project had several significant positive factors with no defaults or weaknesses  |
| Satisfactory (4)  | The project had positive factors with minor defaults or weaknesses  |
| Partially satisfactory (3)  | The project had moderate to notable defaults or weaknesses  |
| Unsatisfactory (2)  | The project had negative factors with major defaults or weaknesses  |
| Highly unsatisfactory (1)  | The project had negative factors with severe defaults or weaknesses |

# Findings

**Relevance**

***The relevance of the project is rated as ‘Highly Satisfactory’.***

1. **Relevance to global priorities/Agenda 2030**

While global actors are almost 10 years away from the goalpost of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (Agenda 2030), “knowledge” has become a crux that complements financial and technical support in global development. While the 2030 Agenda calls for “enhancing knowledge sharing on mutually agreed terms”, the Action Agenda of Addis Ababa strongly encourages knowledge dissemination in sectors contributing to the achievement of the SDGs. That said, with the increasing knowledge divide between developing and developed countries, strengthening the capacities of developing countries for knowledge generation and dissemination has become one of the most essential and critical requirements to achieving the SDGs.

During the evaluated implementation period, the AKP, with the developed knowledge products, provided local institutions such as ministries, academia and civil society organizations, as key contributors to knowledge, successful tools, innovations and practices that allow them to translate their needs into policy and action.

1. **Relevance to regional/national priorities.**

Aiming at developing capacities and systems to promote knowledge-based economic transformations, the Arab Knowledge Project has provided new evidence and analysis, as well as facilitated platform for regional and country-level exchange. For instance, the 2019 edition of the Global Knowledge Index was produced as a roadmap for sustainable development, widening its coverage to 136 countries, while maintaining its focus on the same seven knowledge components. The 2018 edition of the GKI was launched, broadening the coverage from 131 countries in 2017, to 134 in 2018.

The alignment of the AKP with national priorities was remarkably commended by all interviewees: “They always went beyond their duty to ensure adequacy and appropriateness of interventions by all means… they accounted for the cultural, social and political sensitivities of countries, but also they really understood well the psychology of key people, the ones who can really trigger action and change”. This assumption was further explored and validated with the team when it came to selected intervention approaches: “…well this did not happen by chance… way before 2016, we realized the criticality of knowledge in this part of the world, taking into consideration social and political characteristics of the region and certain countries… we knew that we were dealing with very conservative societies, but it did not stop us… first, we had spread the word… from lay population, from youth, who constitute a large bulge of the population, we started… from individuals to communities, then to the society… the positive echoes reached the ears of policymakers… they couldn’t help but engaging and supporting us further”.

In addition to their knowledge and understanding of local realities, the AKP’s team “personalities” and “highly ethical attitudes” as described by all interviewees, as well as their work behavior and the excellent relationships they created with local communities have tremendously contributed to the positive perception of in local communities.

In addition, it was found that the design of the implementation strategy of the project was coherent and consistent with the Regional Programme Document (RPD) during the two Programme cycles 2014 - 2017 and 2018 - 2021. The progress achieved against output indicators during the evaluation period that covers the two cycles figure in Annex VI. The careful scrutiny of regional documents on one hand and the project documentation on one hand, and the evidenced achievements illustrated in the interviews on the other, showed that between 2016 and 2019, the AKP team has successfully fulfilled the attribution aspects and nurtured connections between the Regional Programme Document (RPD) and the implemented interventions during the evaluated period.

In the 2016-2017 period, AKP was in line with the RPD Outcome 2 *(Citizen expectations for voice, development, the rule of law and accountability are met by stronger systems of democratic governance)*, as it provided for example tools that measure the performance of Arab countries in providing their populations with the appropriate environment for building, utilizing and advancing the knowledge they acquire as they develop from young children to young adults. AKP achieved this by ensuring that mechanisms to generate and share knowledge about development solutions are easily accessible (Output 7.7 of the UNDP Strategic Plan 2014-2017, and Output 2.4 of the Regional programme document for Arab States, 2014-2017).

In 2018-2019, the AKP, through its activities and associated knowledge products, has been tangibly and visibly contributing to the Project Document objective of supporting and promoting “knowledge for human development” in the Arab region. The AKP was remarkably aligned with the major objectives and expected outcomes of RBAS/RPD particularly in relation to accelerating structural transformation of productive capacities in a sustainable and inclusive manner (RPD Outcome 1 and RPD Output 1.5.1: Capacities and systems developed to promote knowledge-based economic transformations that foster collaboration between education and industry (Strategic Plan 1.1.2).

In addition, the project’s implementation strategy was highly coherent and consistent both with the donor’ requirements and its commitment in the project proposal logical framework. Moreover, it was also well-aligned with UNDP’s overarching strategic planning documents, UNDP’s mandate and comparative/competitive advantage, as well as national priorities.

1. **Relevance of project design (including participatory aspects and impact, coherence, coordination and complementarity).**

According to OECD criteria for project design[[15]](#footnote-15), two sets of variables were considered in this respect: 1) situation analysis (background studies and strategic analysis of stakeholders, problem analysis, prioritization reflecting future trends and strategic choices made to fix the project purpose, and 2) planning with logic (intervention logic, concrete indicators, approach of implementation, determination of roles and responsibilities…).

That said, the design of the project can be described as *Highly Satisfactory:*

* Before, during the evaluated period, the AKP team succeeded in conducting comprehensive and technically sound assessments and determinants/risks analysis before and during the evaluated implementation period.
* In addition, planning, decision-making and monitoring mechanisms were sufficiently consistent, backed by systematic documentation across interventions. Because of this, it was relatively easy to optimize the approach across the project as a whole. Between 2016-2019, the AKP team succeeded in identifying and leveraging success factors:
	+ 1. An enabling environment was ensured through the effective coordination with partners and by advocating for policy changes;
		2. supply weaknesses were addressed by strengthening capacities of national actors;
		3. individual and community demand was addressed through online and off-line outreach activities; and
		4. quality was pursued through continuous assessments and enhancement of deliverables.
* Building on lessons learned during the 2016-2017 cycle, the team shifted towards more strategic and system -level thinking starting 2018. It can be expected that as the project continues over the coming 10 years (extension period), the ability of the team to adopt an implementation approach that is based on a solid system-level analysis will most likely translate into strategic results and policy-focused interventions.
* Moreover, partnerships with in-country actors (Jordan and Egypt) were significant for triggering knowledge generation, advocacy/social mobilization and policy dialogue interventions. All types of partners (government officials or representatives, academics, local civil society organizations, youth groups) praised during the interviews the partnerships promoted by the AKP team. However, measuring the extent of impact those partnerships might have had does not fall within the scope of the present Evaluation. Whether at the regional or country levels, achieving desirable policy changes at the institutional level requires time, commitment and resources (besides the potential countereffect of emerging crises, volatility of political and economic landscapes, bureaucracy and institutional turnover, etc…)

**Youth vulnerability and engagement of youth in Knowledge Week events.** War, political and macro- and micro-economic instability and rapidly changing contexts have created over years multiple layers of complication for the “youth bulge” who constitutes more than 30% of the population in the Arab Region (Arab Human Development Report, 2016). While only 9 countries (out of 22) have either developed (or are in the process of developing youth policies), the AKP team seized this compelling rational to engage government representatives (both from Jordan and Egypt) in bringing youth engagement in knowledge generation and dissemination firmly into the focus of their institutions. In both areas of implementation, government representatives recognized that UNDP has remarkably succeeded in “triggering the process of fostering youth human capital development, and providing them with opportunities to reach their full potential and contribute to the translation of produced knowledge into policy and action”. The majority of interviewees agreed that “the pro-active engagement of youth in the Knowledge Week events, and all following events - formation of local knowledge committees and capacity building events… might be considered as one of the best means to protect youth from the threats and risks they may face, particularly radicalization”.

**Effectiveness**

***The effectiveness of the project is rated as ‘Highly Satisfactory’.***

In sum, the adopted strategies were strongly relevant to achieving the expected results in the concerned areas in 2016-2019.

1. **Effectiveness of actions to achieve outputs and contribute to desired outcomes**

Both quantitative and qualitative information (primary and secondary data) led to the credence that between 2016 and 2019, the AKP comprised interventions that were effective in responding to promote knowledge societies and policies as transformational means to achieve sustainable development and reached their targets. Annual progress towards outputs, targets and goals are listed in Annex VI.

Some core measurable achievements include:

* **The major achievements throughout 2016** were the revision, dissemination and launch of the Arab Knowledge Index (AKI) 2016. The Index considers six factors critical to the creation of a knowledge society, these include an assessment of the state of education (both at the school and university levels as well as technical and vocational education), in addition to assessing the performance of other related sectors impacting the advancement of knowledge (relating to ICT services and infrastructure, innovation and R&D arenas, and nature of the economy). These factors are directly linked to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), beginning with SDG 4 on education, and building on the connection between education and other goals, including economic growth (SDG8) and gender (SDG5), to reflect the effectiveness of knowledge acquisition, development, and management within the Arab region development context. [[16]](#footnote-16) () - The index has thus been anchored to the internationally agreed 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. In this context, measuring the performance of Arab countries across these interlinked areas was a major contribution of the AKP. For instance, according to the UNESCO expert who participated in the interviews, “by focusing on knowledge and education, the AKP team succeeded in tapping on the current challenges youth are facing nowadays… of course, it complements many of our initiatives, and we hope to build on what has been achieved so far to conceive joint initiatives or projects in the future, especially taking into consideration the criticality of education in the context of COVID-19 in the Region over the coming region, not to forget also the tremendous sequalae of ongoing conflicts in the Region”.

The dissemination of the AKI included a series of post launch events during the first half of the year. These events were held with the participation of policymakers at both national and regional levels. The knowledge4all online portal was revamped and updated with additional features covering: new data visualization modules, enhanced country profiles, advanced infographics produced for each of the six sectors covered by the AKI, both at the regional and country levels, each available in English and Arabic. Data for all 400+ variables included in the AKI were updated and made available on the website. AKP also developed and launched the k4all mobile application as an important tool for promoting the information and data made available on the digital portal. A new initiative undertaken during 2016 related to the topic of reading, which is relevant to the advancement of knowledge. Accordingly, AKP conducted a regional survey on reading and produced the Arab Reading Index, the first of its kind in the Arab region.

* **During 2017,** the AKP has fully implemented and achieved the intended results, through initiating and expanding the outreach strategy set in the beginning of the year. Hence, it has made its most recent knowledge products, namely the Arab Knowledge Index 2016, Arab Reading Index 2016 and knowledge4all portal more visible, not only on the regional arena, but also on the international scene. These knowledge products were launched during the annual Knowledge Summit in Dubai. The AKP participated in the 9th Emirates Airlines Festival of Literature through a dedicated session entitled “Accessible Arabic: The Arab Reading Index and Google Books”. The AKP also participated in a discussion seminar about the Arab Knowledge Index at Alexandria University. Furthermore, the project participated in the Knowledge for Development Partnership Conference at the Palais des Nations in Geneva, to discuss the project’s aims and activities, while touching on the challenges faced in establishing knowledge societies and presenting some of the best practices in facing these challenges. It has also taken part in the 12th interdisciplinary social sciences conference in Hiroshima which accommodated more than 300 attendants representing at least 100 countries, and experts from academia, international organizations and policymakers specialized in sectors as diverse as social and community studies, cultural studies, global studies, environmental studies, organizational studies, communication, educational studies and civic and political studies. Additionally, the AKP participated in the 61st World Statistics Congress in Marrakech which brought together eminent statisticians and members of the statistical community to present, discuss, promote and disseminate research and best practices in every field of Statistics and its applications. The project also presented a paper at the UKFIET Education and Development Forum in Oxford on the skills and values needed to achieve sustainable human development. Furthermore, the AKP participated in the GITEX Technology Week 2017 in Dubai to disseminate to knowledge4all digital portal and mobile application, and also presented the AKI 2016 and ARI 2016 at the second international conference “toward building Egyptian knowledge and innovation society” in Cairo that was attended by 300 participants. The AKP also held three core team meetings in preparation for the Global Knowledge Index, and gathered most recent data for the variables that constitute it, and also formed its advisory board which main task is to review the index’s methodology and structure. A new knowledge product that will benefit the world is now available (the Global Knowledge Index). The index was launched during the Knowledge Summit held on November 21-22 in Dubai under the patronage and in the presence of Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum. The event was attended by around 2,500 policymakers, thought leaders, experts, academics, and top innovators and scientists from all around the world. It was widely covered by media and was featured on primetime news. On social media, the event hashtag became trending in UAE, and attracted during the two days of the Summit a total of more than 69 Million impressions on twitter. The AKP also maintained active feed on Facebook on Twitter, sharing its key updates and activities and developing infographics on knowledge and development. till end of 2017, the project has more than 5,000 followers on Facebook and more than 2,000 on Twitter.
* **During 2018,** under the project output 1 “Global Knowledge Index 2017 and Knowledge4All portal and mobile application outreach strategy implemented,” and in line with the planned activity “Holding a series of lectures and workshops to disseminate the GKI 2017 and Knowledge4All portal and mobile application in the region and beyond,” the AKP has launched the “Knowledge Week,” 2,100 people among students, professors, and researchers were engaged during the first Knowledge Week that was held in Egypt from 6 to 12 March 2018, and 500 people from different ministries, journalists, researchers, university professors, students and representatives of the private sector were engaged during the second Knowledge Week that took place in Jordan from 22 to 26 April. Furthermore, the Global Knowledge Index 2017 was presented being the only index that measures knowledge on the global level, emerging from the Arab region to cover 131 countries, during a high-level event organized by AKP at the United Nations on the 17th of September, ahead of the United Nations General Assembly, with the participation of UNDP Administrator Achim Steiner, under the title “Celebrating Knowledge for Sustainable Development”. The event brought together 70 participants from high-level representatives from the Member States, global experts on knowledge and data, academia and relevant UN staff. Besides, the AKP participated in the London Book Fair from 10 to 12 April 2018. The AKP presented the Arab Reading Index 2016 and the Global Knowledge Index 2017. The Knowledge Products were also presented during GITEX week in 2018 in Dubai.

Furthermore, successful correspondences were made resulting in carrying meetings with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Singapore and the National University of Singapore on 24 and 25 July 2018, and with the Ministry of Education and Culture, Finland on 9 August 2018. The series of meetings aimed at promoting the use of the Global Knowledge Index as a guide to achieve growth and sustainable development and as a tool for change, and to disseminate it widely in political discussions.

Additionally, and as part of the planned activity “Designing and implementing the outreach and dissemination strategy of the GKI 2017 and the Knowledge4All portal and mobile app”, the AKP online and social media presence is significantly boosted. The Knowledge4All portal was able to bring 149,955 users, up from 17,866 users by the end of 2017, noting that during Nov-Dec, the website reached 451,747 clicks from Facebook, Twitter, and Google. AKP accounts has more than 28K followers on Facebook and more than 4,850 on Twitter, up from 5,112 and 2,088, by end of 2017, respectively.

The AKP has recruited a communication agency to support in the outreach and advocacy strategy. The recruited agency is Entourage, which is ranked 19 among the top 100 SMEs in Dubai out of more than 4,500 nominated businesses. It is a result-oriented group of committed professionals from advertising, digital, media, corporate events, production, PR, branding and strategy backgrounds.

As a result, a media strategy was drafted and branding identity for AKP was developed. The strategy aimed to drive an active conversation, raise awareness and inform key project stakeholders and audiences about (1) the mission and vision of the Arab Knowledge Project, (2) key features and anticipated outcomes of the Global Knowledge Index, and (3) the intricate web of relations between knowledge and development.

Under the project Output 2 “Global Knowledge Index 2018 produced and launched, and Knowledge4All portal and mobile application updated and enhanced,” the Global Knowledge Index 2018 was completed and launched, and its coverage widened from 131 countries in 2017 to 134 countries in 2018, maintaining to cover the 7 essential components of knowledge: (1) pre-university education, (2) technical and vocational education and training, (3) higher education, (4) research, development and innovation, (5) information and communications technology, (6) economy, and (7) general enabling environment. In parallel, the GKI 2017 Analysis, under the title “Knowledge and Fourth Industrial Revolution,” was completed and released. The analytical report explores the relationship between the competency of human capital and countries’ competitiveness in the context of the 4IR. Furthermore, “The Future of Knowledge: A Foresight Report” was completed and launched, presenting a pilot study, covering 20 countries, on the future fields of knowledge that will shape the future of knowledge societies. The index and the reports were released during the fifth summit that took place in Dubai on 5-6 December 2018, under the title “Youth and the Future of Knowledge Economy.”

The Knowledge4All portal and mobile app were updated with the new products, and the data visualization tool is enhanced, giving the user the ability to compare among the countries and the results of GKI 20107 and GKI 2018 throughout its components.

* **During 2019,** under the project Output 1 “Global Knowledge Index 2018, Knowledge and the Fourth Industrial Revolution Report, Future of Knowledge Report, and Knowledge4All portal and mobile application outreach strategy implemented,” and in line with the planned activity “Holding a series of lectures and workshops to disseminate the GKI 2018, the two reports, and Knowledge4All portal and mobile application in the region and beyond,” the AKP has launched the “Global Knowledge Index Workshop/Competition,” which falls under the umbrella of the “Knowledge Week” initiative.

The GKI Workshop landed first in Jordan this year. 60 youth participants selected out of 169 applicants from different regions of Jordan presented an action plan to make Jordan a knowledge society. In its second year, the Knowledge Week in Jordan that was held from 24 to 28 March 2019 consisted of a series of university gatherings with students and professors, including Hashemite University and the University of Jordan on, and a youth competition which led to a Global Knowledge Index (GKI) 3-day Workshop under the patronage of the Prime Minister of Jordan Dr. Omar Razzaz. The week engaged more than 800 people among students, researchers, professors, journalists, and stakeholders. The primary goal of the Workshop was to empower the youth to explore innovative ideas that tackle development challenges. Participants were provided with critical knowledge tools to build their future vision of Jordan and create a meaningful impact. The performance of Jordan on the Global Knowledge Index 2018 was the starting point. The Workshop saw the promotion of well-informed dialogue between youth, the government, and other key decision-makers. Also, during 2019, the project carried training workshops with the youth in Jordan, in coordination with the Ministry of Youth, to lead the ‘Knowledge Camps” organized by the ministry targeting more than 800 youths from different parts of Jordan.

Moreover, the Global Knowledge Index 2019 and the Future of Knowledge Foresight Report were presented during a high-level event organized by AKP at the United Nations with the participation of UNDP Administrator Achim Steiner. The event brought together more than 50 participants from high-level representatives from the Member States, global experts on knowledge and data, academia and relevant UN staff. During the event, the UNDP and MBRF renewed a decade-long partnership and signed a new 10-year agreement (2021-2030) to harness the power of knowledge for development.

As well as, both products were presented in major international events, namely, ISI World Statistics Congress in Kuala Lumpur, Frankfurt Book Fair, GITEX Technology Week in Dubai, The Digital World and the Culture of the Arab Child in Egypt, and Human Capital Development Conference in Morocco. Additionally, and as part of the planned activity “Designing and implementing the outreach and dissemination strategy of the GKI 2018, the two reports, and the Knowledge4All portal and mobile app”, the AKP online and social media presence is significantly boosted. The Knowledge4All portal was able to bring 200,942 users, up from 149,955 users by the end of 2019. AKP accounts have more than 29K followers on Facebook and more than 17.5K on Twitter, up from 28K and 4,850, by end of 2018, respectively.

Under the project output 2 “Global Knowledge Index 2019 and Future of Knowledge Foresight Report 2019 produced and launched, and Knowledge4All portal and mobile application updated and enhanced,” the Global Knowledge Index 2019 was completed and launched, and its coverage widened from 134 countries in 2018 [up from 131 countries in 2017] to 136 countries in 2019, maintaining to cover the 7 essential components of knowledge: (1) pre-university education, (2) technical and vocational education and training, (3) higher education, (4) research, development and innovation, (5) information and communications technology, (6) economy, and (7) general enabling environment.

The Future of Knowledge: A Foresight Report 2019 was completed and launched, presenting the latest findings of the ‘Future of Knowledge’ series, which uses an innovative knowledge measurement tool to analyze big data and evaluate awareness of skills and technology in 40 countries, up from 20 countries in 2018.

The index and the report were released during the sixth summit that took place in Dubai on 19-20 November 2019, under the title “Knowledge: The Path to Sustainable Development.” 24 media pieces and multiple broadcast coverage, of 1.8M estimated coverage views, covered the release of the 2019 editions of the Global Knowledge Index and the Future of Knowledge report.

The Knowledge4All portal and mobile app were updated with the new products, and the data visualization tool is enhanced, giving the user the ability to compare among the countries and the results of GKI 2017, GKI 2018 and GKI 2019 throughout its components.

1. **Effectiveness of actions to achieve outputs and contribute to desired outcomes**

Both primary and secondary data led to the credence that as the project was progressing between 2016 and 2019, the team was consistently reviewing and adopting realistic strategies that have improved effectiveness of its interventions. The project, has:

* 1. provided advice and technical assistance to bring about policy changes towards modernising knowledge generation and dissemination in terms of professionalising service delivery and changes to regulatory framework (i.e. scale validation);
	2. called upon Arab and non-Arab experts for contribution to the produced knowledge materials (and validation of final outputs in peer reviewed processes);
	3. fostered awareness raising/advocacy through online and offline outreach activities, in addition to the provision of policy advice when feasible (i.e. in Egypt, the engagement of the Minister of Youth in the Knowledge Week event and the concrete actions that followed);
	4. there were some concerns about the quality of data in certain countries. The Project provided expert advice to shift towards rigorous inclusion/exclusion criteria of datasets;
	5. pursued diverse partnership strategies. It collaborated with ministries, research institutions, regional and local state administrations, and NGOs. In this context, it is noteworthy to mention that in Jordan, the Abdul Hameed Shuman Foundation was engaged as a key partner in the design and implementation of activities, their costing as well as local assessment and planning;
	6. combined upstream and downstream approach with due respect to local norms and values, even in specific contexts such as the Jordanian one (detailed under *Relevance* above);
	7. Customized capacity development activities in a context-specific and culturally sensitive way in each implementation environment;
	8. Assuming its catalytic role in the Region, UNDP RBAS supported Modeling and testing innovations at Country levels through knowledge generation, policy advice and advocacy;
	9. In addition to maintaining and improving partnerships with the MBRF, UNDP started exploring and developing partnerships with corporate donors (including the private sector).
1. **Ability of the project to deal with risks and unexpected major threats**

Results showed that the Project has acquired over years the required levels of flexibility and agility to mitigate circumstances emerging from the evolving situation. As such, the team adopted creative management/institutional support modalities and capacity development efforts to address controllable capacity constraints like increasing training efforts, conduction regular/periodical situational analysis, recruiting Arab and non-Arab experts for validation of outputs, etc…

**Efficiency**

***The efficiency of the project is rated as ‘Satisfactory’.***

1. **Timeliness of achieved outputs**

According to interviewed stakeholders, all interventions were well and timely executed with no significant reported delays.

1. **Mobilization of resources (quantity and quality of allocations)**
	1. Efficiency poses the question whether, given the budget, the specified outputs could have been achieved at a lower cost. The table below demonstrates planned vs. actual expenditure over the 4-year Evaluation period

**Table 5: Planned vs. actual expenditure between 2016 and 2019[[17]](#footnote-17)**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Fiscal Year** | **Planned (USD)** | **Actual (USD)** |
| **2016** | 2,332,524 | 2,015,752 |
| **2017** | 2,495,141 | 2,092,101 |
| **2018** | 1,744,280 | 1,664,997 |
| **2019** | 2,030,330 | 2,049,124 |

* 1. Overall, the Evaluator concluded that the Project was able to achieve the desired results in an economic manner and with manageable transaction costs. There was near consensus amongst partners from government and donors that the AKP results had been achieved with little waste and duplication, given its “very innovative and creative” aspects.
	2. The Evaluator did not have any comparative data to make a fair cost-efficiency judgment.
	3. The Evaluator was impressed that UNDP, through the Project, managed to implement a highly effective resource mobilization strategy and ensure a 10-year extension of the project. As the bulk of funding goes to support activities, long term prospects for financial and programming stability (beyond planned activities) does not fall within the scope of the present Evaluation.
1. **Quality of project management arrangements**
	1. Stakeholders were keen to emphasize flexibility and adaptability of the team both during planning and implementation (amendment of venues and procurement of support devices, customized response to the needs of participants on a case-by-case basis, etc…)
	2. Staffing seems to be extremely adequate and the skill mix seems right to meet the intended results. As work mostly included elements of soft assistance (e.g., standards development, training, policy advocacy) it makes the application of conventional efficiency indicators to these areas not feasible (i.e. procurement of assets, comparative analysis to alternatives…)
	3. The staff have shown to be resilient to the rapid and drastic changes by managing to keep the same response pace. While this observation can be of great significance by means of change, it remains limited to the particular context of the Evaluation exercise and the limited generalizability (due to the qualitative nature of a considerable part of results), and hence, needs further investigation.
	4. Low turnover in the team (UNDP staff and team of experts) have positively affected the team’s performance, leading to a strong institutional memory and a maximization of available resources.
	5. RBAS developed and applied quality control tools (regular site visits, progress reports…) to maintain oversight on implementation and expenditure. Most of the modalities proved efficiency at the time of use.
	6. Communication tools utilized in the AKP with local communities achieved their intended results. However, causality and attribution are yet to be validated and consolidated.
	7. AKP does have a robust M&E architecture in place, which easily allows monitoring and assessment of progress and hence positively affects overall effectiveness of AKP operations. However, the scope of coverage of the baselines can be further scaled up or down depending on what data is available and the budget allocation (for example, with reference to the monitoring frameworks).
	8. The consideration of gender and disability issues along the evaluated period was commended by all informants. According to most, in the different contexts of implementation, teams were keen to reflect on specific issues that may be experienced differently, and how they relate to one another and the societal forces that shape power relationships. According to all interviewees, the team was always “exerting tremendous efforts to ensure gender balance and representation of People with Disabilities (PWD) in organized events, while reducing all kinds of barriers they may face”. For instance, interviews revealed that “way beyond ticking the box for cross-cutting issues, the AKP team exhibited extreme flexibility to accommodate for the logistics and operational needs of PWD, either for them to comfortably participate in the planned events, or implemented their selected initiatives afterwards...”. However, considering the documentation of the project (project documents, progress reports), one would find that it does not reach the level of systematic incorporation (although classified as GEN2).
	9. MBRF’s visibility in outputs is strong, with tangible and valuable attributable achievements.

**Impact**

***The impact of the project is rated as ‘Satisfactory’.***

1. **Outputs potential contribution to changes beyond the lifespan of activities/project**

Various stakeholders from government, civil society, youth groups and donor organisation confirmed that the AKP project has contributed positively to some changes in institutional performance and policy changes by the Government (e.g., formation of national Knowledge Committees, allocation of premises, support of ministries, discussions about early intervention policies). It can be expected that by the end of the project (by 2030), the AKP will make a substantial contribution in the formulation of basic policies and national development objectives in the areas of knowledge generation, knowledge dissemination and articulation of knowledge and action-oriented policies towards fulfilment of the 2030 Agenda obligations.

However, although UNDP’s role was highly valued and acknowledged by government and non-government partners, it is still early to comment on the extent to which achieved interventions have systematically contributed to a change in government practices.

**Sustainability**

***The sustainability of the project is rated as ‘Satisfactory’.***

1. **Ownership of results**

The Project utilized a proper mix of relevant strategies in pursuing UNDP’s RBAS catalytic role with measurable success achieved in policy dialogue and advice, knowledge generation and capacity development of government and civil society.

The project was a demonstrated model of collaborative/participatory work among stakeholders and a good initiative towards ‘institutional ownership’.

1. **Capacity development for partners**

Through the capacity development components, sustainability was systematically addressed in the project’s design and through its implementation. The project has noticeably contributed to improving local actors’ ownership and prevented disruption of services in more than one area of intervention through regular follow-up which sometimes was done even though it was beyond the scope of action of this project. Majority of interviewees commended the sustainability prospects of the AKP. One of them advised that “ although we did not hesitate for a second to allocate premises for youth meetings, sustainability does not necessarily consist of premises and assets… sustainability is generation of knowledge and know-how and transfer to others to keep things going no matter what happens… it is not a hit and run, it is always attempting to build on what was done… sustainability is defined by the extent to which what you achieved can be replicated”.

On the other hand, the modernization of knowledge (AI) and the transformation of conventional tools were both seen by the team as inextricable elements necessary to enhance country level systems whereas strengthening national capacities through capacity development and provision of technical advice enables the functioning of the system to uphold introduced changes.

1. **Modes of delivery appropriate to promote regional/national ownership and sustainability**

AKP established its sustainability in a number of ways. First, there is a high probability that many of the AKP initiatives will be reflected in policy and legislative frameworks. Second, the project enhanced capacities of national and local governments, local civil society organizations through training sessions, workshops and discussions. The Evaluator found that many of capacity-development activities addressed identified needs and directly contributed to achieving specific AKP inputs. Third, prospects of sustainability were enhanced by aligning the AKP activities with national development priorities (as stated by interviewed government representatives in Jordan and Egypt). Fourth, cooperation with multiple government and development partners was expanded, which would eventually further improve sustainability as other partners can carry the AKP’s prospects forward.

# Conclusions

The AKP has, in general, been marked by noticeable achievements, given its particular context conditions and timing of implementation. In addition to the documentation review, most of the answers to the Evaluation questions with which the Evaluation was carried out were positive. In addition to meeting the pre-set figures, the project’s achievements included the timely, adequate, and continuous delivery and improvement of services , including the creation of new ones, in response to the needs of recipient partners and stakeholders. As evidenced in the course of the Evaluation, the project has prompted in certain instances traceable changes in the way key actors in the region look at knowledge production.

The evaluative conclusion is the following: the AKP is ***satisfactory*** project that has achieved the intended results, with strong potential impact at both Regional and Country levels. The project has demonstrated the power of joint efforts across governments and the various engaged stakeholders.

With an extremely tailored and targeted approach, the project has set a solid foundation to ensure that critical expertise and necessary tools are available inhouse for the production of implementation of the AKP for the years to come. Moreover, the project triggered further efforts towards institutionalizing of knowledge in the selected implementation environments, opening up the room for more consistently factoring knowledge products into policy making and planning.

Recommendations

**Table 6: Suggested recommendations in line**

**with main findings per Evaluation criteria**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Main rating per criterion** | **Recommendation** |
| **Relevance***Highly Satisfactory* | Maintain and further develop standards and procedures (meetings, assessments/situational analysis/contingency plans, etc.) to ensure readiness to quickly identify and address unexpected/emerging issues and extend support to UNDP Country Offices in new areas of catchment  |
| **Effectiveness***Highly Satisfactory* | Keep on exploring possibilities of joint initiatives with agencies such as UNESCO for education verticals, which would eventually foster complementarities and synergy among UN agencies to collectively work together on common national/regional development priorities.  |
| **Efficiency***Satisfactory* | Further develop the Results Framework and M&E architecture of the project and corresponding quantitative and qualitative reporting tools, so that monitoring and measuring achievements and progress of the project.  |
| **Impact***Satisfactory* | Plan and support the systematic incorporation of cross-cutting issues, namely gender in the project documentation along any project cycle. |
| **Sustainability***Satisfactory* | Initiate awareness raising efforts to sensitize Government institutions in new Arab settings on the importance of backing decision-making and policy-making with knowledge, and consequently, encourage them to mobilize required funds in their national budgets, which will enhance “institutional ownership” of initiatives at country level.  |

# Lessons Learnt

The Evaluator identified the following specific lessons learned:

**Table 7: Lessons learnt in line**

**with main findings per Evaluation criteria**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Main rating per criterion** | **Lessons Learnt** |
| **Relevance***Highly Satisfactory* | In the extremely complex realities of the Arab Region, the results-oriented approach and continuously monitor internal and external supporting and constraining factors affecting operations are key factors to ensure the relevance of interventions. |
| **Effectiveness***Highly Satisfactory* | The importance of strategic partnerships with UN sister agencies and international financial institutions on advancing knowledge is critical and essential |
| **Efficiency***Satisfactory* | The diversification of means of verification (quantitative and qualitative) is essential to capture the quality of interventions that are usually reported numerically. |
| **Impact***Satisfactory* | Quality and reliable data are critically important to identify vulnerable groups (especially when it comes to gender, disability and vulnerable/marginalized groups), assess equity aspects and monitor whether the mainstreaming actions implemented advance their rights. |
| **Sustainability***Satisfactory* | Strategic positioning can be considered as a cornerstone for national, regional or international scale-up, especially in the context of South-South and Triangular Cooperation between and among developing countries. |

# Annexes

## ANNEX I Terms of Reference of the Evaluation

## ANNEX II Evaluation Matrix

## ANNEX III List of individuals or groups interviewed

## ANNEX IV List of Supporting Documents Reviewed

## ANNEX V Project Results Framework

## ANNEX VI Summary Tables of Progress towards Outputs, Targets and Goals

## ANNEX VII Code of Conduct Signed by Evaluator

1. It is the entity that has overall responsibility for implementation of the project (award), effective use of resources and delivery of outputs in the signed project document and workplan. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Criteria for the selection of interviewees consisted of: type of stakeholders and nature of engagement in the AKP (Experts as contributing authors, donor representative, public institutions/ministries representatives, youth participants in knowledge events), cross-cutting issues (gender, human rights, disability) and geographic scope. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. <http://www.unevaluation.org/document/download/548> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. <http://www.unevaluation.org/document/download/2787> [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. <http://web.undp.org/evaluation/guideline/documents/PDF/UNDP_Evaluation_Guidelines.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. The UNDP Regional Programme for Arab States (2014-2017) was endorsed by the UNDP Executive Board in 2014, and the following cycle (2018-2021) endorsed in 2018. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. HANAFI Sari and ARVANITIS Rigas, Knowledge Production in the Arab World. The impossible promise, London & New York, Routledge, 2016 [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. <http://www.arab-hdr.org/> [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. <https://www.knowledge4all.com/en/HeatMap> [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. https://www.knowledge4all.com/en/129/Pages/The-Future-of-Knowledge--A-Foresight-Report-2019 [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. **Output 1:** Arab Knowledge Index (AKI) and Knowledge4All digital portal developed, launched and enhanced to provide easily accessible data on knowledge accumulation, production and consumption within a development framework, and **Output 2:** Participatory platforms organized to maximize outreach and dissemination of knowledge products developed and educational capacities (ministries, universities, regional research institutions, etc.) enhanced to improve the state of knowledge in the Arab countries. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. During this phase, the evaluator:

reviewed and analyse all relevant documents,

summarised the information already gathered and limitations, and identified issues still to be covered.

Documentation included the following: (Please refer to the annex: List of documents reviewed)

Regional Programme Document for Arab States (2014-2017) and (2018-2021)

Annual ROARS (2016-2019)

Project document, substantive revision to the Project Document (2016-2020)

Annual work plans and progress reports (2016-2019)

Other documents and materials related to the interventions to be evaluated [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. *Key enablers and barriers* shall be the internal and external influencers when considering the overall effectiveness of the AKP. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Hill, C. E. (Ed.). (2012). *Consensual qualitative research: A practical resource for investigating social science phenomena.* American Psychological Association. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. https://www.oecd.org>finland [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/2111education%20and%20sdgs.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. As reported in the AKP annual progress reports between 2016 and 2019 [↑](#footnote-ref-17)